

State of
Washington
House of
Representatives



COMMERCE & LABOR
HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS
JUDICIARY
JOINT COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS AFFAIRS &
MILITARY FAMILIES
VICE CHAIR



Shailah A. Ricketts, a ninth-grader at Heritage High School, and her brother, **Donald S. Ricketts**, a sophomore at Heritage High School, served as Legislative Pages this year. Shailah and Donald are the daughter and son of **Shannon Lowe**.

Mary Rose Allred, left, a sophomore at the School of Arts and Academics, and **Julia Hamilton**, a ninth-grader at Fort Vancouver High School, served as Legislative Pages this year. Mary Rose is a daughter of **Tamera Smith Allred** and **Brian M. Allred**, and Julia is a daughter of **Laurel Hamilton** and **Rob Hamilton**.



D ear Neighbor:

We used just about every hour of the 105 days set aside for this year's legislative session. In my opinion, it was time well-spent.

At the risk of sounding a little like the theme from an early *Superman* comic book, I'd call this a session of justice and fair play. Protection for vulnerable citizens in the sway of people who want to exploit them. Health care for kids in low-income families. Equal rights for couples in committed relationships. Our work in Olympia this year, though not as fast as a speeding bullet, surely kept the *Daily Planet* abuzz.

Please know that I am very grateful for the continuing honor of representing our communities and neighborhoods in Vancouver and Clark County.

Take care,

Jim Moeller
State Representative
49th Legislative District

693-0804 (*my local phone number*)



✓ **Peace of Mind:**

New public policy aims to put a stop to abuse, exploitation of vulnerable adults

You know what can happen when a person's health declines and he or she isn't thinking clearly any more. All too often, someone comes along only too happy to exploit the situation. We need stronger laws so an honest person can step in and help prevent this abuse — or at least stop it before it gets worse. This is the goal sought last year by the Clark County Vulnerable Adult Task Force.

The work of the task force led to legislation I sponsored this year. We approved a new law to strengthen protection for folks at-risk of abuse and exploitation. The measure makes the Adult Protection Act easier to enforce. We want to halt the escalating ill-treatment of vulnerable citizens, including elderly men and women who rely on others for basic needs.

I'm very grateful to have worked with dedicated members of the task force. Advocates for senior citizens, social-service providers, and representatives from law enforcement and the prosecutor's office were among community members who gave time and heart to developing the plan we passed this session.



✓ **Well-being:**

Our ailing health-care system in great need of emergency attention

A couple of dramatic numbers confronted this year's Legislature. These are figures that don't belong on our state's resume. One of them is 520,000 – the number of Washington adults who don't have health insurance. The other is 72,000 — the number of Washington children who don't have health insurance. I've said this in most every newsletter: The soaring cost and plummeting availability of health care is a public emergency.

The price is climbing faster than governments, businesses and, most importantly, citizens can afford to match. Many adults without insurance are full-time workers and small-business owners. What happens for uninsured people when a medical condition comes up that they can't ignore any more? They go to the emergency room, which is the most expensive option and which drives up costs for everyone.

We passed landmark legislation to phase in health-care coverage for all Washington children. Starting with kids from low-income working families, the new law will work with parents, employers and other folks to ensure that all kids have coverage by 2010.

We also approved a plan to help thousands of people who are now one injury or illness away from bankruptcy. The new Washington Health Insurance Partnership will improve health care through a public-private partnership that reforms the way we buy and sell coverage for small employers. Unfortunately, a compromise late in session made participation for employers optional. Although this will greatly hinder performance of this reform, at least it's a step.

Another successful new policy addresses the fact that many senior citizens live in fear of what the new federal Medicare Part D prescription-drug law means for them. The new measure removes the co-pay for medicines for low-income senior citizens and disabled citizens.



✓ **Fair Play:**

Domestic-partnership benefits are reasonable and commonsense principles

Last year, our state took the historic, long overdue step of outlawing discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation. We did the right thing for Washingtonians — all six million of us. This year, we approved a policy to establish a domestic-partnership registry in the secretary of state's office. The bill assures certain limited benefits for couples who register. Specifically, these rights have finally become available for domestic partners:

- Visitation of a partner who is a patient in a health-care facility, and right to give informed consent for health-care decisions for a noncompetent partner who is a patient.
- Disclosure of health-care information about a partner without authorization.
- Right to make funeral arrangements for a deceased partner, and right to consent to autopsies for a deceased partner.
- Authorization for organ and tissue donation for a deceased partner.
- Inheritance rights for property of a deceased partner when there is no will.
- Administration of the estate of a deceased partner if no one else was named or the named person is unable to serve.

Keep in mind that well over 400 rights and obligations associated with marriage are not included in this domestic-partnership registry. Among the rights and obligations left out are community property, and the right not to testify against a partner in court. Also missing are survivor-benefits for state pensions, and the authority to use family court to supervise a dissolution of a relationship.

The main objective in this new standard is to provide protection for couples who are not able to marry. Heterosexual couples have the option to marry, but couples with at least one individual over age 62 often have strong financial disincentives to marry and are also able to register under this new law. Same-sex couples have limited such options, even with the new state law.

For your information, the ACLU has prepared a guide for individuals wishing to know more about domestic partnerships. You can access the guide at: <http://www.aclu.org/getequal/rela/domestic.html>.



✓ **Three Budgets:**

Two spending plans key schools and health care, a third stresses highway safety

It often seems that nothing, no legislative-news story gets as much day-to-day ink or airtime as our wrangling over the budgets. That's especially true for the operating budget, which covers most all programs and services. This is the one state law that you can single out and see exactly where people put their priorities. All the feel-good rhetoric in the world is meaningless if you can't stand up to difficult financial decisions required in the budget.

The new operating budget underscores education, including stronger funding for early learning programs, math and science instruction, special education, and college enrollments. We also support better children's health care, including mental health, as well as vaccinations and dental needs.

School-construction is a bigger theme in the capital budget. In our region, the budget covers work at the State School for the Blind, the State School for the Deaf, Clark College, and the Vancouver National Historic Preserve.

The transportation budget continues important projects aimed at bolstering highway safety and relieving congestion. Some of the biggest projects include widening Interstate 5 from Salmon Creek to Interstate 205, rebuilding an Interstate 5 interchange at Northeast 134th Street and Interstate 205, the rail bypass and 39th Street bridge, and an interchange at State Route 500 and Thurston Way.

Here is a link to more information on the new budgets: <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/budget/legbudgets/0709biennial.asp>



✓ Furthermore:

*Some additional measures succeed,
but others remain in play for next session*

Many other measures made it to the governor's desk — some I sponsored and a good number I supported in committee and on the floor. One of my specific bills will establish a work group to review and update child-support schedules. The idea is to make sure the system is fair both for parents and, certainly, for children. We should consider the actual cost of child-rearing, and look at raising the mandatory minimum support obligation for lower-income parents.

A second bill I sponsored requires employers that provide food, beverage and entertainment to disclose the percentage of automatic service charges paid directly to employees if it's added automatically to the bill. While some employers give the whole charge to the employee, others give only a little. In fact, it's increasingly common that employers give none of it to the employee.

Another proposal I advanced outside the legislative session itself has also become a reality. The Washington State Investment Board has adopted a policy to ensure that investments of public-retirement funds won't be used to support genocide in Sudan. I spent several months last year working with Board staff and the national Sudan Divestment Task Force to formulate the measure. Here is a link to more information about the resolution, as well as the resolution itself: http://www.housedemocrats.wa.gov/members/moeller/20070316_Sudanese_investment.asp.

Next session, we will restart efforts to set up a sales-tax holiday for residents and businesses in our border region.

We will also work to capture more support for a plan to provide electronic filing of lobbyist information. This E-filing plan was passed as a budget proviso and the feasibility-study parameters are being developed at the Public Disclosure Commission.

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From the desk of
Representative Jim Moeller

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